



EPA to unveil Fallon arsenic study results in meeting

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FALLON - The results of a federal study analyzing the possible health effects of long-term exposure to arsenic will be released at a town hall meeting here next week.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will present results of a study which involved hundreds of Fallon-area residents at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 21 at the Fallon Convention Center.

In total, 905 Fallon and Churchill County residents participated in the study, which was conducted in September 2002, said Ann Brown, a spokeswoman for the EPA's office of research and development.

Participants had to be age 45 or older and have lived in the area for at least 20 years. They provided blood and urine samples and answered questions regarding diet, water consumption, medical history and exposure to substances like diesel, pesticides and solvents.

The meeting will be the first time the information is presented to the public.

The study results were initially expected by early 2003, but two incidents pushed the time frame of the study back by 2½ years, Brown said.

Priority was given to work during the cleanup of the World Trade Center following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and the analytical laboratories needed for the Fallon study were used for that purpose, Brown said.

Then, a small pilot study had to be completed to determine the best method to analyze toenail samples, she said.

Fallon Mayor Ken Tedford, who participated in the study, said city officials have asked for many years for research to be done in Fallon regarding arsenic. In 1997, Tedford wrote 80 members of Congress asking that the city be studied for potential health implications from arsenic in the water supply.

Though he hoped for a good turnout at the meeting, Tedford said, "People who have been around here for a long time don't get that excited for this kind of thing."

Study participants received individual reports nine months after samples were collected, Brown said.

The city had been told by the EPA and others that Fallon's population was too small to be statistically significant. Few studies concerning long-term exposure to arsenic have been completed.

Arsenic and other heavy metals such as tungsten have been mentioned as possible causes of Fallon's childhood acute lymphocytic leukemia cluster. Since 1997, 17 area children have been diagnosed with ALL. Three children have died.

An investigation led by the Nevada Division of Health, which included the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, failed to pinpoint an environmental cause of the cluster.

An arsenic treatment plant was completed in April 2004 to remove arsenic from Fallon's water system. A federal standard of 10 parts per billion for arsenic in drinking water begins Jan. 23.

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